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MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR THE SOUTHERN REGION

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C O N T E N T S

- ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT 2 - 3
- RURAL/URBAN INTERFACE 4 - 5
- WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY 6 - 7
- RECREATION, WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES 8 - 9
- SPECIAL AREAS 10 - 11
- COMMODITIES 12 - 13
- SILVICULTURAL PRACTICES 14 - 15
- TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS 16 - 17

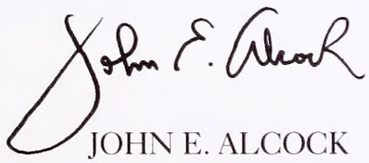
The strategies that follow reflect a changing emphasis and a fresh look at the National Forests in the Southern Region. They also represent our response to changing public attitudes demonstrated over several years of intensive interest and comment.

We believe our strategies are in tune with the strategic plan for the Forest Service presented in the 1990 RPA Program— *The Forest Service Pathway into the 1990's and Beyond.*

These strategies are not intended to cover all Forest Service programs and activities. Rather, they are meant to communicate a general shift in emphasis in eight areas that will ultimately be reflected in individual Forest Land and Resource Management Plans. Although the strategies represent our current sense of needed change on Southern National Forests, they will be further tested and refined through the intense public review that is a part of the normal planning process on each National Forest.

Our overall goals are to: ▲ Provide prompt, courteous and professional service to the public. ▲ Accomplish high quality multiple-use management on the National Forests of the South. ▲ Conduct our planning and decision making in an open and timely way. ▲ Strengthen our traditional partnerships and reach out to potential new partners who have an interest in Forest Service programs. ▲ Search for new knowledge about resource protection and management. ▲ Apply the latest appropriate technology.

Our strategies will be constantly reviewed and updated. We welcome your reaction to these changes.



JOHN E. ALCOCK
Regional Forester

ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

The National Forests in the Southern Region were created mostly from lands that had been in private ownership, many of which had been abused by logging, forest fires, and erosion. Given protection, scientific management, and investment over the past five decades, these forests have now recovered many of the values that were not present when the lands were acquired. The forests have become unique and valuable public properties subject to diverse and growing demand for all resources.

Multiple-use management of the National Forests for the renewable resources of water, wood, forage, recreation and wildlife has served the nation well. However, an increased demand for resources is challenging land managers to look for new and innovative solutions to often conflicting demands.

Our educated and environmentally sensitive society wants more attention given to all of the plants and animals that exist in the forest and to the relationships between them and their physical environments. This interest translates into concern for ecosystem management, biological diversity, threatened and endangered species, and much more.

The recovery and management of Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species is an especially important part of ecosystem management. The Southern Region has the most (86) T&E plant and animal species of any Forest Service region in the United States. The National Forests provide habitat that is essential for the recovery and survival of these T&E species. Many innovative projects are underway to recover and sustain T&E species as important parts of complex ecosystems. Yet there are gaps in our knowledge about T&E species and their habitat requirements, and especially their relationships with other plants and animals.

The Forest Service is committed to a broadened sensitivity to ecological and social values and sees it as a natural, more sophisticated extension of multiple-use/sustained- yield management.

STRATEGIES

- Evaluate the ecological values of National Forest lands in their local and regional environments and place a higher importance on these in planning and decision making.

- In cooperation with others, complete and implement an ecological community classification system for inventorying resources, including T&E species on the National Forests.

- Aggressively support research on the complex interrelationships that are the key to ecosystem management.

- Identify "showcase" areas on the National Forests where the latest ecosystem management technology can be demonstrated.

- Through intensified training of Forest Service employees, increase understanding, expertise and pride in T&E management.

- Use the Caribbean National Forest in Puerto Rico to demonstrate the principles of ecosystem management in tropical forests.

The National Forests in the Southern Region have now recovered many values that were not present when the lands were acquired. More attention will be given to all of the plants and animals that exist in the forest and to the relationships between them and their physical environments.

Many National Forests in the South are near fast-growing urban areas. Managers of these Forests are trying to design strategies to cope with increased demand for all resources while protecting them for the future.

RURAL/URBAN INTERFACE

Many National Forests in the South are near fast-growing cities, creating what is called the rural/urban interface. Examples include the Chattahoochee National Forest near Atlanta; the Sam Houston National Forest near Houston; the Caribbean National Forest near San Juan, Puerto Rico; and the George Washington National Forest near Washington, D.C.

Managers of these Forests and others are trying to design strategies to cope with increased demand for all resources while protecting them for the future. Significant problems at the rural/urban interface include increased demand for road and utility rights-of-way, fire protection with increased potential for loss of life and property from wildfire, overuse of recreation facilities, and resistance to some management activities on nearby National Forest lands.

On every National Forest in the South there are places where individual houses or new communities are being built on private land in or near the National Forests. These developments in remote areas are making it difficult for local governments to provide services. Traditional approaches are not providing solutions to this rapid change. We simply do not know enough to make informed choices about the best use of National Forest land in these areas.

STRATEGIES

- Identify rural/urban interface areas for study and analysis.
- Develop better knowledge about public needs and preferences on National Forests close to fast-growing cities.
- Develop better methods to repair and improve over-used and outdated National Forest facilities.
- Increase research on the social, economic, and environmental contributions of National Forest land close to large cities.
- Start new approaches and partnerships with local governments in rural/urban interface, so that all landowners may be considered in the development of plans and policies.
- Increase efforts to inform and educate new National Forest "neighbors" about multiple-use management of the Forests and the Forest Service mission.

WATER QUALITY AND QUANTITY

One of the main reasons for establishing National Forests in the South more than half a century ago was to protect the headwaters of important rivers. With the growing competition for clean and abundant water across the South and the national concern for protecting wetlands and riparian areas, that reason is even more important today. An estimated one-third of our Nation's wetlands are located in the Southern Region.

STRATEGIES

- Work with other government agencies, the private sector, and others to ensure that current and future wetlands laws and regulations are scientifically sound and permit forest management on appropriate sites.
- Increase support for wetlands and riparian management research.
- Increase monitoring of National Forest watersheds to get baseline information and determine management effects on water quality and quantity.
- Increase protection, management, and improvement of riparian areas on the National Forests through Best Management Practices (BMP's) and standards and guidelines contained in Forest Land Management Plans.
- Increase efforts to acquire key private tracts —from willing sellers or through land exchange —to promote watershed improvements inside National Forest boundaries.
- Increase involvement in coastal zone management issues that may affect forest management.

The National Forests in the South were established more than 50 years ago to protect the headwaters of important rivers. Management of these important watersheds along with protection of wetlands and riparian areas is even more important today to assure clean and abundant water.

RECREATION, WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

The public's use of Southern National Forests for recreation, hunting, and fishing has increased dramatically over the years. Rapid population growth has fueled an increased demand for recreation, including hunting and fishing. This use is especially intense where National Forests are close to cities, as in Texas, Georgia, Virginia, and Puerto Rico.

Our population is becoming more multicultural and there are more dual career and single-parent families. This, along with increased travel costs and other factors, is causing people to search for recreation closer to their homes. The National Forests in the South are within a day's drive for 150 million people.

In addition, many private lands that were once available for public hunting and fishing are now being leased to private clubs and groups. This places greater demand on the National Forests as the only large blocks of public land open to hunting and fishing. There is also rapidly growing interest in the nonconsumptive uses of wildlife and fish.

Recreation use on the National Forests in the South totalled more than 29 million visitor days in FY 90. Visitors can select from 1,600 campground and picnic areas, 104 beaches, 76 Wilderness Areas, three National Recreation Areas, five Wild and Scenic Rivers, 7,500 miles of hiking trails, and much more. Demand for developed facilities is rapidly growing. Maintenance of existing recreation facilities has not kept pace.

The public wants a variety of safe, secure recreational opportunities, including access for persons with disabilities. There is a growing need for expanded interpretive and education programs as a part of the public's recreation experience. In addition to traditional uses, the challenge is to provide a wide variety of outdoor recreation that meets the needs of changing lifestyles and a multicultural society.

STRATEGIES

- Increase the emphasis on all aspects of recreation, including fisheries and wildlife.
- Conduct research to define the outdoor recreation experience and facilities desired by society.
- Expand the number of partnerships with the recreation and tourism industry, the business community, and others to provide appropriate National Forest recreation opportunities.
- Implement the President's "America's Great Outdoors" initiative to improve recreation facilities and programs.

- Accelerate the development of programs and facilities to serve all of society, including persons with disabilities, under-represented groups, and non-traditional families.

- Intensify training in Good Host skills to improve visitor service and safety.

- Develop additional educational interpretive programs as an integral part of National Forest recreation.

- Expand wildlife partnerships and State Wildlife Agency coordination and cooperation.

The challenge is to provide a wide variety of outdoor recreation that meets the needs of changing lifestyles and a multicultural society. The National Forests in the South are within a day's drive for 150 million people.

SPECIAL AREAS

Because the 12 ¾ million acres of National Forests in the Southern Region have now mostly recovered from past abuse, they contain many beautiful and unique areas. Over the years, *Congress* has designated many special places in our Southern National Forests, including:

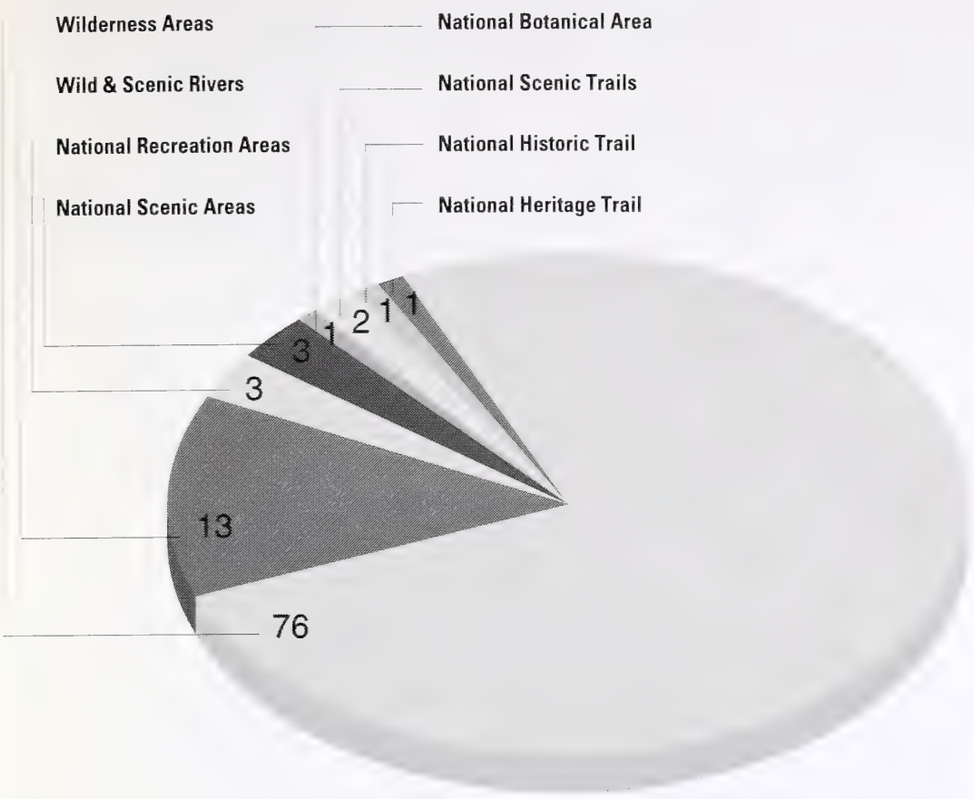
	Number	Acres	Miles
Wilderness Areas	76	700,531	
Wild & Scenic Rivers	13	* 33,955	357
National Recreation Areas	3	165,511	
National Scenic Areas	3	55,651	
National Botanical Area	1	8,426	
National Scenic Trails	2		894
National Historic Trail	1		5
National Heritage Trail	1		63
TOTALS	100	* 964,074	1,319

* *This figure does not yet include the acreage of eight Wild & Scenic Rivers added to the system in May 1992.*

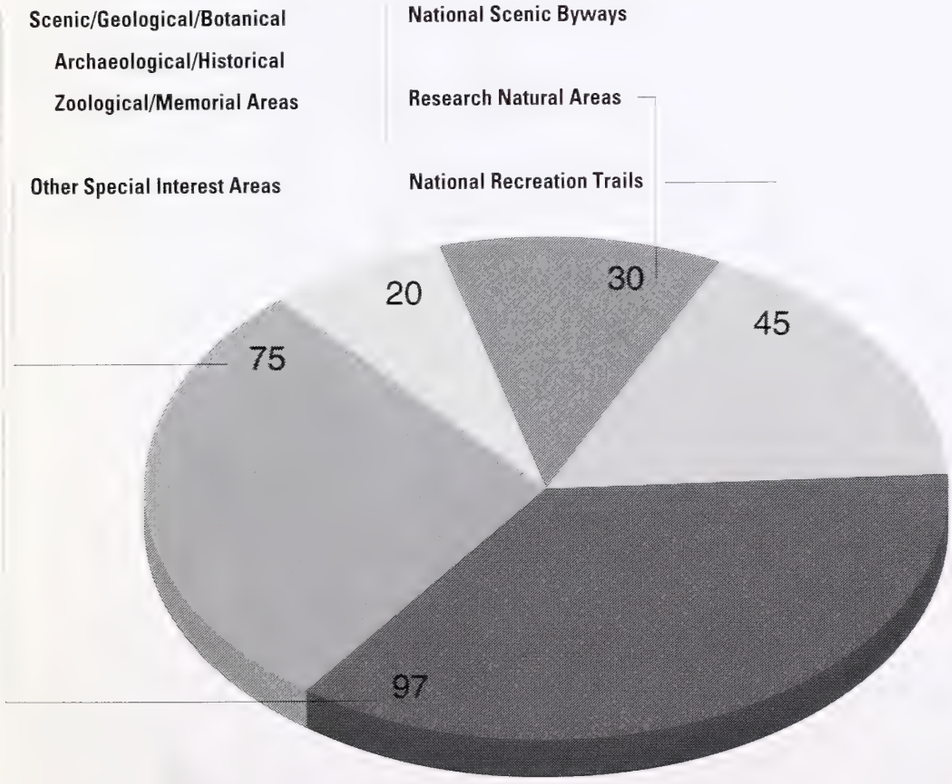
In addition, many other special areas are protected and managed under *Forest Service* designations, including:

	Number	Acres	Miles
National Scenic Byways	20		634
Research Natural Areas	30	15,000	
National Recreation Trails	45		1,191
Scenic/Geological/Botanical Archaeological/Historical Zoological/Memorial Areas	97	111,272	
Other Special Interest Areas	75	118,386	
TOTALS	267	244,658	1,825

SPECIAL AREAS DESIGNATED BY CONGRESS



SPECIAL AREAS DESIGNATED BY THE USDA FOREST SERVICE



The National Forests in the Southern Region have now mostly recovered from past abuse. They contain many beautiful and unique areas that are receiving special management and protection.

About 10 percent of all land on the National Forests in the South has been designated for special management. Public support continues for designation of new special areas.

Limited budgets and personnel have prevented some special areas from reaching their full potential. For example, plans for Scenic Byways have not been fully implemented. Planned recreation facilities in National Recreation Areas have not been constructed. Some trails in Wilderness Areas are not maintained to Forest Service standards.

STRATEGIES

- Through the land management planning process for each National Forest, intensify efforts with the public to identify areas that deserve special designation.

- Utilize the additional funding from the President's "America's Great Outdoors" initiative to improve facilities, maintenance, and general management of special areas.

- Provide more public information about the existence and purpose of special areas to gain support for improved management.

- Place the highest priority on those areas designated by Congress.

COMMODITIES

The laws related to National Forest administration call for making commodities available to the American people. The Administration and Congress reaffirm this part of our mission each year through the budget process.

Timber and minerals are the most prevalent commodities produced on the National Forests in the Southern Region. The production of these commodities is compatible with the multiple-use management of the National Forests. In some situations it is the most efficient way to manage and maintain healthy forest ecosystems.

The value of National Forest commodities has increased over the years. The total gross revenues from commodities in the Southern Region in 1930 was about $132,000. In 1991, total gross revenues amounted to more than $93,300,000.

About 84 percent of National Forest receipts result from the sale of timber. Another 12 percent is from minerals — primarily oil, gas, and common variety materials like gravel. During the period 1989 to 1991, more than $45,000,000 was generated by the sale of oil and gas leases.

National Forest lands are not a part of the local tax base. Instead, 25 percent of the gross revenues from the sale of timber on National Forests is returned to the States and local governments where National Forest land is located. There, money is used to support local schools and roads. In FY 91, $23,300,000 was returned to local governments. The remainder of the receipts generated from the sale of commodities are returned to the U.S. Treasury.

Jobs, income, and taxes are generated by the harvesting and processing of National Forest commodities. In FY 90, more than 13,000 jobs, $300 million of local community income, and $44 million of Federal Income tax were generated by the sale of timber from Southern National Forests. Most of our National Forests are located in areas of high chronic unemployment. Jobs related to the production of National Forest commodities are very important locally and are commonly the primary source of employment.

The actual amount of commodities produced on each National Forest is determined through the land management planning process as required by the National Forest Management Act. However, it seems clear that the amount of commodities produced from Southern National Forests will actually be reduced by some amount to meet the needs of threatened and endangered species, protect special areas, reduce clearcutting, phase out timber sales that produce negative benefits, and, in general, practice more ecologically sensitive management.

STRATEGIES

- Ensure that Forest Plans emphasize the actions needed to protect and sustain diverse ecosystems while also providing a sustainable and reliable flow of commodities to our customers.

- Seek ways to sustain or increase commodity production that are compatible with ecosystem protection and management through scientific forest management and research.

- Continue the effort to build public consensus on the level of commodities to be made available from Southern National Forests.

- In cost/revenue analysis of commodity programs, ensure that benefits and costs to other uses are properly taken into account.

- Increase the emphasis on the production of high-value commodities such as large diameter hardwood sawlogs and veneer.

- Continue to make National Forest minerals available for development where it can be accomplished in an environmentally sensitive manner.

- Continue efforts to reduce the cost of commodity production on Southern National Forests without sacrificing environmental protection.

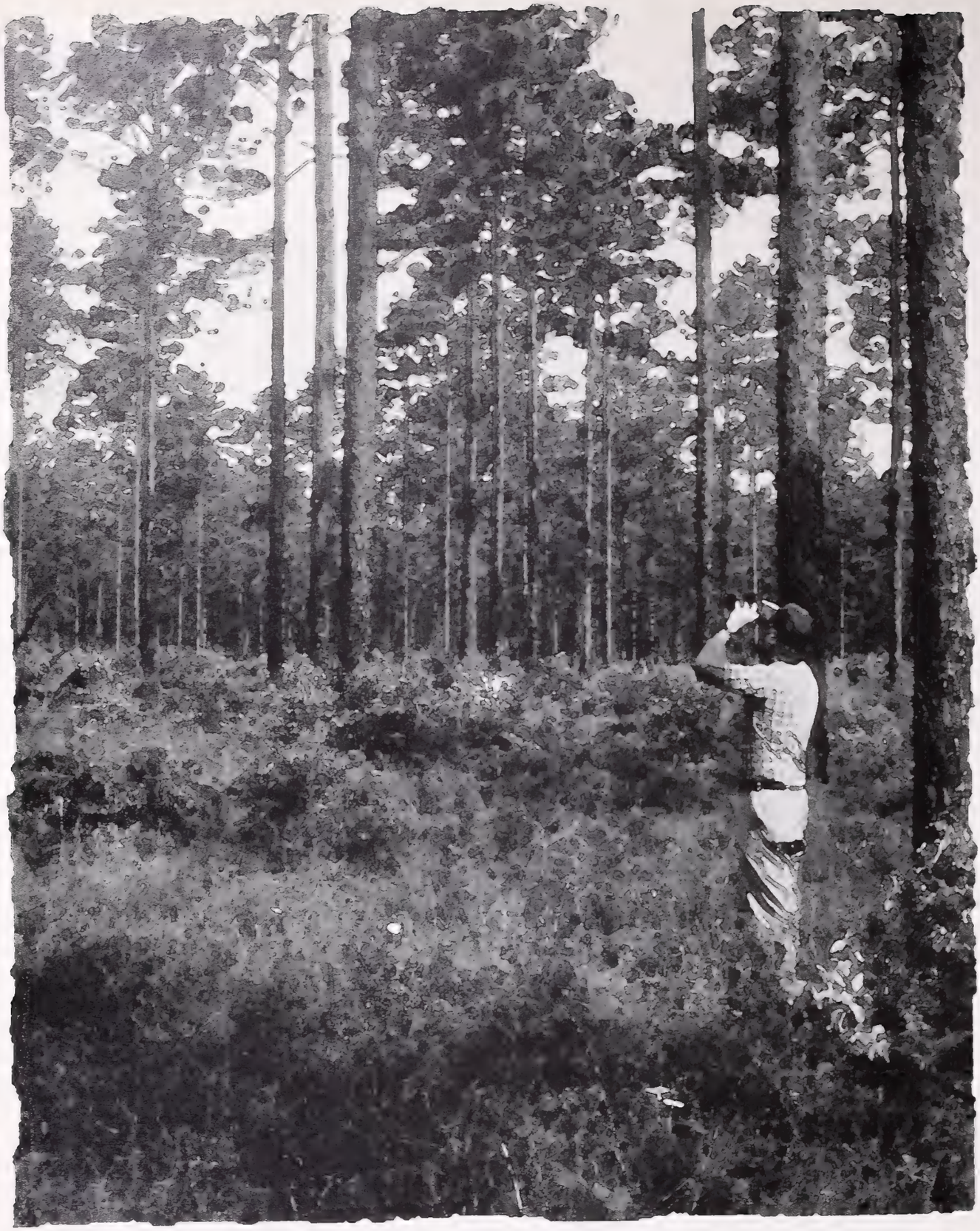
- Demonstrate the compatibility of scientific ecosystem management and commodity production on Southern National Forests.

- Through orientation and training, ensure that all Forest Service employees understand that the mission of the Forest Service includes the production, harvest, and extraction of commodities.

- Strengthen multiple-use management assistance to non-industrial private forest landowners through State and Private Forestry programs and in cooperation with State Foresters.

- Increase efforts to promote the economic wellbeing and diversification of rural economies, especially those impacted by changing Forest Service commodity programs.

The production of commodities like forest products and minerals are compatible with the multiple-use management of the National Forests. Such products are important to local, regional, and national economies.



Clearcutting has been drastically reduced on the Southern National Forests over the last five years. Other harvesting methods that create less disturbance on the landscape are being used.

For more than 25 years, National Forests in the South have been managed by a silvicultural system called evenaged management. Clearcutting has been the dominant method of starting a new stand of healthy, desirable trees.

Clearcutting is scientifically sound for many situations and has been successful in meeting multiple-use objectives like improved habitat for some wildlife. However, many people think clearcutting disturbs the landscape too much and detracts from other multiple-use values.

Public opposition to clearcutting has been strong on those National Forests in the Appalachian, Ouachita, and Ozark Mountains. Several National Forests have responded to this issue by reducing the amount of clearcutting. Instead, they use more seedtree, shelterwood, and group and single tree selection harvests, which create less disturbance on the landscape. As a result, acres planned for clearcutting on the Southern National Forests have been reduced by more than 60 percent in the past five years.

STRATEGIES

- Continue to reduce clearcutting. Wherever possible, replace clearcutting with scientifically sound alternative harvest methods, including shelterwood, seedtree, and various forms of unevenaged management.
- Use clearcutting in those instances when an interdisciplinary professional team finds it is the optimum method to start a desirable stand of trees and meet overall Forest Plan objectives.
- Do more research to find acceptable alternatives to clearcutting. Accelerate the implementation of appropriate research.
- Do more to reduce the overall cost of the timber program to offset the higher cost of alternatives to clearcutting.

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

An adequate system of roads is essential to the protection, management, and public use of the National Forests in the South. The roads are used primarily by people driving for pleasure, to get to recreation sites, to reach hunting and fishing areas, and to transport forest products.

Many roads were constructed for timber harvest before the lands were acquired for National Forest purposes. Often, they were not properly located originally and resulted in environmental damage.

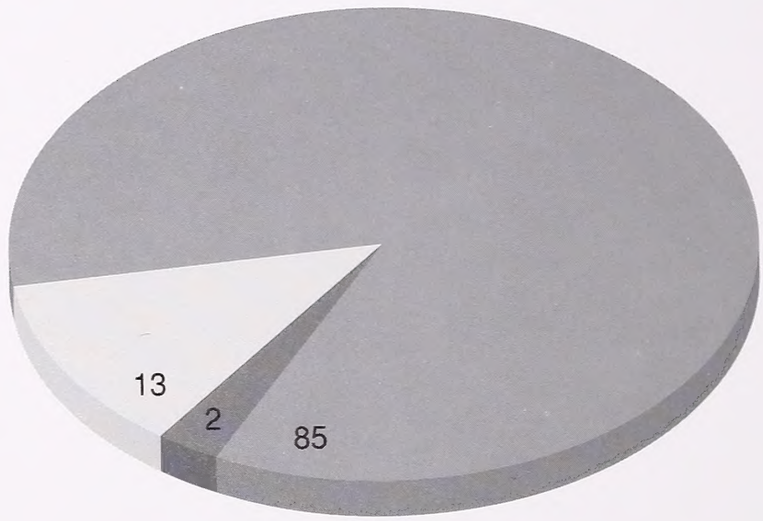
Many of these old logging roads have been closed and the land restored. In their place, a properly engineered permanent road system is being built. Currently, this consists of arterial, collector, and local roads as shown in the chart below. About 85 percent of the planned permanent road system necessary for proper management of Southern National Forests is now in place.

Most roads built today are low-impact, temporary roads. Nearly 80 percent of current road work consists of rebuilding and/or relocating existing substandard roads.

Much of this work is accomplished by the purchasers of National Forest timber in conjunction with their harvesting activities.

About 12 percent of all new roads constructed are closed and replanted with trees or grass following timber harvest.

The most common public complaints regarding National Forest roads in the South concern inadequate road maintenance. Also, some people who believe there are already too many roads oppose building more. The possible effect of roads on wildlife and water quality are additional concerns. Opinion also varies as to whether specific roads should be closed or open to public use and timing of the closures.



Class	Miles	%
Arterial	627	2
Collector	4,664	13
Local	29,327	85
Totals	34,618	100

Arterial Roads: Usually paved, double lane, higher speed; maintained for passenger car traffic and open to public travel.

Collector Roads: Usually gravel surfaced, single lane, slower speeds; usually passable by passenger car and open to public travel.

Local Roads: Usually unsurfaced, single lane, low speed; maintained for pickup trucks and high clearance vehicles only. Many are closed after intended use.

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STRATEGIES

- Place the highest priority on restoring and maintaining roads that are open for public use and/or where resource damage may occur.
- Reduce the mileage of open roads to concentrate maintenance funds on our highest priorities.
- Do more cooperative work with local road authorities and the public to improve efficiency of road maintenance and reduce the total miles of road serving the National Forests and our neighbors.
- Use road standards that allow the intended use of the road at lowest cost while protecting resources.
- Increase emphasis on the management and maintenance of Scenic Byways.

Good roads are essential to the management and public use of the National Forests in the South. About 85 percent of the permanent road system is now in place. Most roads built today are low-impact, temporary roads.

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